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SUBJECT: SCATTERED PROTESTS AND REPRISALS FOLLOWING SECOND
SAMARRA BOMBING

REF: BAGHDAD 1955

Classified By: Political Counselor Margaret Scobey for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

11. (C) Summary: So far, the response to the second bombing of the holy Shia al-Askariya mosque in Samarra June 13 has been restrained, compared to the first attack in February 2006, which sparked large-scale sectarian violence. However, the violence following the first attack on Samarra did not ignite immediately, meaning that the next days will continue to be sensitive. According to press reports 14 Sunni mosques have been damaged or destroyed since June 13, many in Basra. Sadrism-instigated demonstrations occurred in Baghdad and Najaf; On June 15 Muqtada al-Sadr called on Shia to march to Samarra July 5 to protest the bombing. The statements by political and religious authorities appealing to Iraqis to remain calm and refrain from reprisals have remained consistent and had an encouraging effect (reftel). Friday sermons on June 15 echoed calls for restraint and warned against the consequences of sectarian violence and civil war. Representatives of Grand Ayatollah Sistani and ISCI head Abdulaziz al-Hakim called on Shia not to fall into the "takfiri-Saddamist trap," and blamed the GOI for ignoring early warnings of the attack and failing to protect the holy sites. Leading Shia also point to threats to shrines in Karbala which they want the GoI to take seriously. They also criticized U.S. forces for having a role in the attack and/or for the deteriorating security situation in Iraq generally, and called on the GOI to secure the road to Samarra and begin reconstruction of the holy shrine. End Summary.

Attacks on Sunni Mosques

12. (SBU) According to press reports, a total of 14 Sunni mosques have been attacked throughout Iraq since June 13. Shortly after the, Sunni contacts in Basra reported random demonstrations at Basra's second largest Sunni mosque. The mosque appears to have been attacked by a mob; according to local press four people were killed and a number injured. Several other Sunni mosques in Basra were attacked June 13, some reportedly with RPGs. On June 15, a bombing destroyed the Talha bin Abd-allah mosque, also in Basra, but no injuries were reported (the main gain was all that was left standing). Prior to the imposition of the 3:00 p.m. Baghdad curfew, three Sunni mosques in Baghdad were attacked on June 13 but according to media only one was partially destroyed. Five attacks on Sunni mosques in Babil were reported overnight June 13-14, including the Hattin mosque which burned to the ground resulting in one death.

Friday Sermons

13. (U) In his June 15 sermon, Sistani's representative in Karbala Abdel Mehdi al-Karbala'i warned worshippers not to allow their reactions to be "steered by emotions, or all sides would be losers." Karbala'i urged all to respond to the religious authorities call and be mindful of the consequences of a sectarian war that would result in grievous losses and paralyze the activities of daily life. Karbala'i criticized the Iraqi government for not doing more to prevent the destruction of the minarets, despite information that the mosque was being targeted, and called for the GOI to establish a timetable for securing the road to Samarra and reconstructing the holy shrine. (Note: PM Maliki said a contract for reconstructing the edifice was on the verge of being signed when the bombing happened. End note.)

14. (U) In his Friday sermon in Najaf, ISCI cleric Nasser al-Qubani blamed "infiltrated" Iraqi security forces for doing nothing to prevent the second Samarra attack, and occupation forces for having helped increase the pace of terrorism in Iraq "by freeing terrorists who were detained by government forces." Al-Qubani also lashed out at Iraqi's Arab neighbors for "coddling terrorists and encouraging them to thwart the Iraqi political project." Despite these attacks, al-Qubani ultimately blamed the Samarra attack on forces that want to drag Shia into sectarian warfare, and ended on a positive and democratic note, declaring, "We will not be drawn in no matter what the terrorists try. The Iraqi people have chosen a path from which there is no turning back and are committed to participation by all."

15. (SBU) In a Sunni Baghdad mosque, Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) Imam Ahmad al-Ubaidi preached that Shi'a and Sunni "must unite together." The time has come, Al-Ubaidi told Sunni worshippers, for all Iraqi to unite and stop the

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killing and blood shed regardless of the sects. He said that GOI Ministry of Interior forces were behind the Samarra bombing for the purpose of building hatred against the U.S.-Led Coalition Forces.

Sadr Calls for July 5 March to Samarra

16. (U) Following Sadr's June 13 call for three days of peaceful demonstrations and "sit-ins," there have been almost constant demonstrations in Najaf, as well as some in Baghdad's Sadr City, and al-Hillah. On June 16, anti-American cleric Muqtada al-Sadr called for a march to Samarra July 5 in protest of the June 13 bombing. He criticized Iraqi political parties, including his own, for failing to react more strongly to the Samarra bombing perpetrated by the "triangle of evil," the U.S., Britain and Israel, asking, "Where are you Badrists, Sadrists, Fadhillas?" Because Samarra is located in the predominantly Sunni Salaheddin Province, Sadr urged Sunnis there to welcome Shia marchers with open arms on July 5.

17. (C) Comment: Despite sporadic demonstrations and attacks on Sunni mosques, the nation-wide reaction to the June 13 bombing has been relatively tame so far, however we should point out that the violence following the first attack took several and weeks to develop. In June 15 Friday sermons, Shia clerics called for quick reconstruction of the mosque, a move which would likely help maintain the calm so far witnessed as well and encourage the continued positive position of the Najaf authorities. PM Maliki's initial moves to visit the Shrine shortly after the bombing, and his announcement of GOI investigation into the role of Ministry of Interior police in the attack have helped keep Shia emotions in check. GOI follow through on this, security in road to Samarra, and reconstruction efforts in the short run will be important to maintaining the support of Shia political figures and the Marja'ia in calling for unity and restraint. With Samarra located within the predominantly

Sunni Salahaddine province, Sadr's July 5 Shia Shia march to
Samarra will also be a test for Iraqi sectarian restraint.
End Comment.
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